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No address for service on record or public access is restricted

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PATENTS ACT 1953
COMPLETE SPECIFICATION

Title of Invention:

Booking system and apparatus

Name, address and nationality of
applicant(s) as in international
application form:

V A RIVERS LIMITED, a New Zealand company of c/- 20 Mervyn Drive,
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NEW ZEALAND
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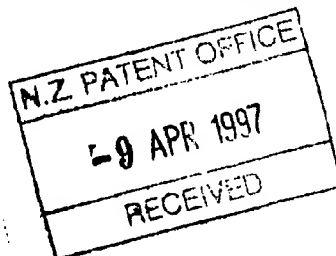
COMPLETE SPECIFICATION

BOOKING SYSTEM AND APPARATUS

We, **V A RIVERS LIMITED**, a New Zealand company of C/- 20 Mervyn Drive,
Christchurch 8006, New Zealand

hereby declare the invention, for which We pray that a patent may be granted to us and
the method by which it is to be performed, to be particularly described in and by the
following statement:

PT0550408



BOOKING SYSTEM AND APPARATUS

The present invention relates to a method of providing travel, entertainment and selected services to a user. More particularly, although not exclusively, the present invention relates to a method and apparatus for providing travel and related information and making travel related reservations.

To the present time, traditional reservation booking techniques usually entail an end user approaching a travel reservation service, either in person or via telephone, whereby the user queries a person directly regarding the services and facilities which may be available. Alternatively it is known for a user to base purchase decisions and selections upon printed information obtained independently from a travel reservation service. Such techniques can be cumbersome and in some cases do not provide sufficient information for the user to make an informed decision about an accommodation or travel destination choice. In particular, printed information relating to accommodation destinations can become rapidly out of date due to changing tariffs, day by day accommodation capability and variations in particular services.

Accordingly, it would be desirable for a user to have access to the most up-to-date information as is available.

Further, it is common for a user, particularly when travelling in a geographical region of interest, to visit various information centres in order to obtain information relating to activities, services, goods or accommodation which is provided in the geographical area. Often the accumulation of such information can be haphazard, and a particular service provider (or vendor) may be unable to ensure a sufficiently wide

distribution of advertising or promotional material because of the user visiting only a selection of locations where such information may be provided.

Accordingly, it would be desirable to provide a facility whereby up-to-date information is available relating to a particular geographical area or region. Such information would be analogous to that traditionally distributed by vendors in the tourism or travel industry.

Further, it would be advantageous for an end user to be able to query such a facility in order to tailor the information obtained to the particular users interests and/or requirements and/or tastes. Also it may happen that a visitor is unaware of new opportunities relating to travel, entertainment or the like, when in a certain location. It is desirable that such a visitor have access to as up to date information as possible. Further, querying another person can be unreliable and information may be missed which may otherwise be considered relevant to the end users requirements. Verbal question and answer sequences can be unreliable, poorly focused and hurried depending on the physical location and potential time constraints.

Further, the provision of searchable information in a form accessible to a user may remove any bias or personal preference on the part of the intermediary or vendor. Such a bias may hinder a users selection of a particular service or facility.

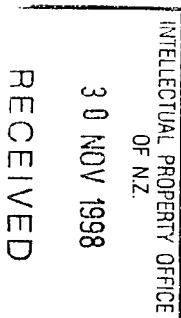
To the present time, it is also known that end users may communicate with a reservation booking service in order to obtain tickets or vouchers for particular goods, facilities or service. Particularly in the case of accommodation and travel, the user conventionally communicates with a person remotely located at a travel reservation centre, who in turn interrogates a computer database or the like at the remote location in

order to determine the availability of the required facilities and services. Such a method can be time consuming and prone to error as the verbal communication as to the availability of facilities and services can be time consuming and incorrect information can be given. There is also the possibility of the person at the travel reservations centre entering inappropriate or incorrect data and therefore making incorrect bookings. Also, in some situations it may not be completely clear to an end user precisely where the appropriate travel reservation centre is located. Thus, the attempts to make bookings may be frustrated by a lack of knowledge of the correct phone number, address or other contact details of the appropriate vendor.

Therefore, it would be desirable to integrate a query and product and/or service purchase system so that a user need not gather excess or unwanted information in order to make appropriate travel reservations. It would also be advantageous to provide a system where the process of querying an information database leads the user through a sequence of questions or requests for criteria following which the user optionally makes an appropriate purchase on the spot. This would avoid the need for the separate establishment of a verbal communication link between the user and a travel reservation centre and removes the booking agent from the chain of communication. An objective is to provide an end user with a focused, visible and easily accessible service access point.

Accordingly, it is the object of the invention to provide a product and/or service purchase system and apparatus which overcomes or at least mitigates the abovementioned disadvantages or at least provides the public with a useful choice.

In one aspect the present invention provides for a product and/or service purchasing system comprising:



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one or more user interface means adapted to allow user interaction with a local and/or remote database;

one or more database;

one or more vendor interface means adapted to allow vendor interaction with said database; wherein the database is adapted for access by both vendors and users wherein availability of products and/or services is governed by both sales by users recorded on the database and vendor updates which vary the availability of the services and/or products.

Wherein the user interface means comprises a kiosk optionally including:

one or more display means;

information and/or query input means;

printing means;

audio transmission means;

financial transaction recordal means; and

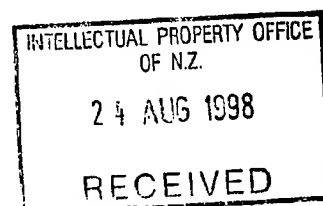
on-site data storage means.

Preferably the vendor interface means corresponds to a touch tone telephone, personal computer or the like.

Preferably the on-site data storage means contains one or more of the following:

graphical, textual, audio and multimedia based data.

(continued on page 5a)

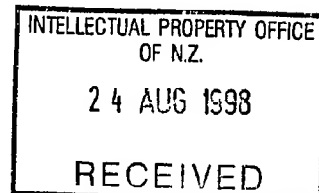


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- 5a -

In an alternative embodiment, the user interface means comprises an in-house television signal distribution system adapted to communicate with a local and/or remote database wherein commands are transmitted to the database from the user via the signal distribution system which a user communicates with by means of an infrared remote control, key pad, touch tone telephone or the like.

(continued on page 6)



In an alternative embodiment, the user interface means comprises a personal computer adapted to interact with a local and/or remote database.

Preferably the one or more databases exchange data by means of one or more routers, said routers and databases being connected to a data transfer network.

In an alternative embodiment, the one or more databases communicate directly.

Preferably the vendor interface means and user interface means communicate with either one or more routers and one or more central databases by means of telephone data links.

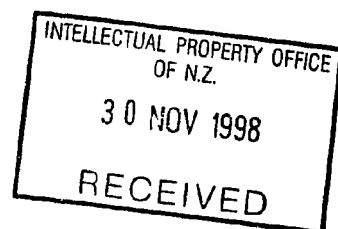
In an alternative embodiment, the vendor interface means may comprise a personal computer adapted to interact with a local and/or remote database.

Preferably the vendor interface means are connected directly to either one or more routers or to one or more local and/or remote databases.

The present invention also provides for a method of recording product and/or service availability including the following steps:

a vendor establishes a booking record on a database via a vendor interface means, said booking record including information relating to the number of available booking units thereby establishing the availability of products and/or services;

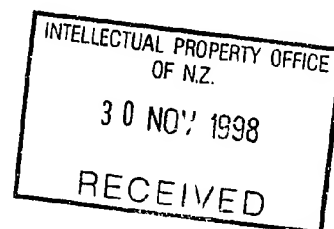
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an end user establishes a connection with the database via a user interface, wherein the user interrogates the database regarding the product and/or service availability according to the user's booking criteria;

if a free booking unit is available in a particular booking record corresponding to the end user's ultimate selection, the database transmits that information to the end user;

(followed by page 7)



the end user optionally selects the booking unit or returns to the interrogation step;

if a selection is made the end user pays for the product corresponding to that booking unit thereby constituting a sale to the user; and
the database is updated to reflect the sale of a booking unit.

The method further includes the step of the vendor updating the database by:

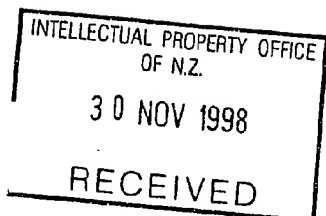
establishing a communication link with a database;
flagging one or more booking units in a particular booking record as either sold or unsold.

In a further embodiment, the user may update the booking record by changing the system capacity in response to real time criteria.

Preferably the user interrogation step comprises:

selecting a particular product or service category;
entering parameters corresponding to the user's criteria requirements or taste;
in response to each parameter input, the database providing one or more options from which the user may select one or more;
the user optionally requesting audio, video or textual information relating to the option, alternatively or in combination, the user requesting the purchase of a particular product or service;
the user accepting an option produced by specifying the appropriate criteria;

paying for the product or service where required; and
the system updating the database to reflect the sale of the product, service or distribution of the information.



In an alternative embodiment, the vendor may prepare information in a form suitable for storage on the local or remote database, whereby the vendor uploads said information to the database.

The invention will now be described by way of example only and with reference to the drawings in which:

Figure 1 illustrates a block diagram reflecting communication links of components of the present system;

Figure 2 illustrates a flow chart detailing a query process; and

Figure 3 illustrates a schematic outline of an embodiment of an allocation method.

Referring to Figure 1, a schematic diagram of a particular embodiment of the present system is shown. Various preferred embodiments of what is hereafter referred to as the KIPS™ interface are shown by 11, 12, 13 and 14. It is to be understood that these embodiments are not limiting. The following discussion will be primarily in the context of a standalone kiosk as described below. The user interface hardware may be in the form of a kiosk 11 which is a standalone device similar in appearance to an Automatic Teller Machine. The kiosk may incorporate a screen and keyboard to effect user data input or alternatively a touch sensitive screen as is known in the art. The kiosk may also incorporate a magnetic media reading means such as a credit card swipe unit or similar means for reading magnetic credit cards, bankcards or the like. The kiosk 11 may also incorporate a printing means capable of printing vouchers, tickets, information sheets and promotional material.

The combination display screen and user input device (whether touch screen or keyboard based) may be driven by computer hardware known in the art. Alternatively, it is envisaged that the keyboard means may be a simplified keypad array surrounding the perimeter of the display screen wherein icons or text indicating the function of the adjacent key appears on the display screen.

One of the functions of the kiosk is to provide graphical, video, audio and textual information about a travel destination or service. However, it is known that data transfer times over even a fast network link may be insufficient to provide an effective on line viewing capability. Accordingly, it is envisaged that kiosk 11 will incorporate onsite data storage media wherein the data stored relate to those services and goods which are available in the local geographical (or otherwise defined) area. The information onsite may reflect all included options while up to date availability information is stored remotely. Alternatively, the particular data may be determined on the basis of the statistically most likely relation of a user. Such a determination would be made on the basis of collected preference data.

Such media may comprise CD ROMS or conventional magnetic discs. An advantage with CD ROMS is that they may be easily replaced and/or updated as required. The software to operate the kiosk computer hardware may be written in a conventional programming language (for example Visual Basic, C, C++ or a low level language if required) and interact with a user by either textual or graphical prompts and icons.

The computer within the kiosk 11 may be coupled to a communications device by means known in the art and it is envisaged that the modifications necessary to

construct the simplified keyboard entry system (where required) as well as the communication means, are considered within the purview of one skilled in the art.

The particular software implementation for running the booking and enquiry system may be tailored for the particular situation and the services and goods which are to be provided by the vendors.

Other KIPS™ interfaces are indicated by 12, 13 and 14. These may manifest themselves as the following: an online link from a hotel, where the user interacts with the system by means of the hotels internal television signal distribution network. User signals may be transmitted to the television network by means of a corresponding remote control unit. Such techniques and modifications are analogous, although not identical, to those found in known TeleText™ systems. The interface system may also be operated by a users or motel customer service home personal computer 13. In this case the user would purchase or otherwise obtain KIPS™ software which would communicate with a router 17 by means of a modem. In this embodiment, the user may interact with the KIPS™ software by means of a mouse, keyboard or similar pointing device. The kiosk 11 may be incorporated into a commercial premises such as petrol station, grocery store or the like (as indicated by 14). In this case, financial transactions may be made not only by means of the magnetic media interface, but by direct payment to the retailer at the kiosk location. In situations such as these, it is envisaged that more elaborate printing means may be provided, as it is likely that the kiosk will be constantly supervised by the owners of the commercial premises. In contrast the kiosk 11 being a standalone or remote device, may require heavier duty equipment to provide a deterrent and protection from vandals or similar unauthorised use.

The various KIPS™ interfaces 11, 12, 13 and 14 may communicate with a router 17 or 18. Alternatively, communication may be effected directly with the database computers 16 and 17. The choice of the particular router will be governed by the geographical location of the KIPS™ user interface being used. In the case of the home PC user 13, it is envisaged that the user would dial a telephone or freephone number which would automatically connect to the router appropriate for the geographical area which the user is interested in, or alternatively located in. In the case of the standalone kiosk 11, hotel interface 12 and retailer kiosk 14, established telecommunication lines or similar data transfer networks may be used to connect to the router 17 or 18. It is envisaged that such routers may communicate by means of commercially available network service provider services.

The hotel interface 12 and retailer kiosk 14 may incorporate data storage media similar to that in the standalone kiosk so as to provide video, audio and textual information on line. The personal computer KIPS™ interface 13 may have a more limited capacity due to the limitations in data storage capabilities of personal computers and the requirement to distribute potentially large amounts of information to individual users along with the KIPS™ interface software. In cases such as these, smaller, compressed or otherwise abbreviated image, video and/or audio data may be provided via a fast modem link. The router 17 may also be connected to a point of sale transaction sale network facility as is known in the art. The issue of tickets, for a home user, may occur by Fastpost™, courier or by confirmation at a users site advising a valid ticket being forwarded.

Accordingly, it can be seen that the bulk of the data routing and handling is performed by established communication networks provided by commercial service provider and/or banking services.

The routers 17 and 18 may communicate with central databases 15 and 16 by means of network communication links such as are known in the art. The programming of the central database computers to effect communication with the routers is to be considered to be within the purview of one skilled in the art and no further discussion is provided herein in this regard. The central database computers may contain additional information to complement the data stored remotely in the kiosks. The distribution of such data could be determined based on the likelihood of users querying such information. It is envisaged that the central database may be more suitable for storing large volumes of text information rather than audio/video data text based as text can be more rapidly transferred to the kiosk which is requesting the data. The central database computer further incorporates booking record software which will be discussed below.

The booking record software performs the function of recording user purchases in respect of goods or services. The system is distinguished from known travel reservation systems in that the central database computer essentially records availability information which may be updated by either the activity of the user (by purchase) or the vendor (in response to demand and order factors) on a real time basis. This function will be discussed below in the context of the method of making and recording bookings.

The central database computers may be divided into geographical regions wherein each central database contains information appropriate to that region. Such regions may reflect provincial, national park, city or similar boundaries appropriate to the services contained or provided in that region. For example, information relating to national parks could be located in the central database computer which is geographically proximate the users likely entry points for that national park. In this way, delays in the transfer of image information (if required) and other communications may be reduced.

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The vendor services are indicated by 19 and 20 in Figure 1. Vendors communicate with the KIPS™ database systems by means of the same routers which the users communicate with. Alternatively, the vendors may communicate directly with the central database. It is envisaged that, at a minimum, the vendor communicates by means of a touch tone telephone in order to communicate information to the central database via the router. In this particular embodiment, the vendor calls the KIPS™ database vendor interface wherein a recorded message leads the vendor through the information recordal and updating process. Such systems are known in banking wherein a customer may transfer money, pay bills or otherwise carry out financial transactions by phone. Such programming and hardware implementation is considered to be within the purview of one skilled in the art. Alternatively the vendor site 19 or 20 may employ a personal computer system running KIPS™ software appropriate for the vendor. By this method the vendor communicates with the router 18 via an established network service provider or telecommunications line.

Thus it can be seen that the overall system may be split into three essential components: user interfaces; central databases; and vendor interfaces. The interaction and the data flow between these components will now be discussed in the context of a user purchase of a good or service provided by a vendor.

Referring to Figure 2, a particular user activity is illustrated. The transaction will be described in terms of the standalone kiosk. It is envisaged that typically a user will be present in a geographical area in which there exists services and goods in which the user is interested in purchasing or using. A user will locate the closest KIPS™ kiosk to effect the intended transaction. Initially the user activates the KIPS™ kiosk either by payment or alternatively, the kiosk will remain in a receptive state continuously.

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It is envisaged that in a multi-language environment, the system will query the user as to the appropriate language in which the query and transaction is to take place. This interrogation may be in the form of pictograms or icons such as flags or textual information in the appropriate language. Once selected, the user selects the category of information which is to be queried. Such categories may include accommodation, local events, travel arrangements or similar services and products. The present description will be described in terms of accommodation as this form of transaction most readily illustrates the advantages of the KIPS™ system.

The user is presented with instructions describing how to enter a query in relation to the accommodation required. These may be in the form of parameters governed by the user's preferences. The user may select the location, the existence of any appropriate discounts, whether the establishment has a restaurant and perhaps whether facilities are provided for disabilities, diet requirements, fitness activities etc. Such a query may be in the form of either a search string which is entered textually, or graphical parameter entry wherein the user responds to specific icons and queries presented by the KIPS™ software running on the kiosk computer and the query strings are communicated to the central database. The query process is to be interactive in that once a location is selected, a subset of suitable accommodation sites may be highlighted following which the user may request images of one or more of the accommodation sites. The user may select or discard such images based on personal preference and taste. Thus it can be seen that, by a process of narrowing down the accommodation selection based on location, discounts and other criteria, the user is presented with a number of images and additional details such as tariff and perhaps directions on how to physically locate the accommodation site. Once the user has selected the appropriate accommodation site, the user notifies the KIPS™ kiosk computer 11 by means of

keyboard entry or touch sensitive screen. If the particular selection is not accepted the user may return to the initial parameter input stage.

Once the user has accepted the offered accommodation site, the user pays by means of a magnetic card interacting with, for example, the EFTPOS system following which a ticket or voucher is printed. At this point it can be seen that the user has had no need to interact with a person and the selection and booking of accommodation may be made in a completely autonomous manner.

It is envisaged that the available options will only be presented if there exists booking available corresponding to that particular option. The means by which the KIPS™ kiosk database is updated in accordance with vendor available bookings will be discussed below.

Immediately prior to printing the ticket/voucher, the KIPS™ kiosk communicates with the central database by means of router 17. The updating and availability recordal technique will be discussed below.

It can be seen that the process illustrated in Figure 2 is easily adapted to the provision of information and other facilities appropriate to goods and services, particularly in the context of tourist facilities.

Information relating to product/service availability is stored on the central database appropriate to the geographical region or area in which the user is querying the KIPS™ kiosk is located. Other databases are automatically accessed if required by the users criteria. Again, the particular example described will be with reference to an

accommodation booking process as this most clearly illustrates the technique provided by the present invention.

Central databases 16 and 17 store booking records relating to particular vendors and services in that geographical area. These are schematically represented by Figure 3. Referring to Figure 3, a typical booking record 30 is shown. The particular booking record corresponds to a service or product provided by a vendor and therefore is identified by that product and the available number of booking units (in the context of accommodation) with which the KIPS™ database system is to interact. A vendor record 30 illustrates potentially seven booking units A, B, C, D, E, F, and G, each corresponding to a particular unit of accommodation such as a motel room or similar. The vendor or KIPS™ administrator has previously set up the vendor record so that four accommodation units A, B, C, D are dedicated to local customers who may make bookings in the conventional manner either by approaching the vendor directly or through a travel agent. Three booking units E, F and G are allocated to the KIPS™ system and are considered by the vendor to be unavailable to conventional users.

When a user queries the KIPS™ systems at a remote kiosk 11, and selects the particular accommodation product, the appropriate central database records the sale of the accommodation product G by flagging the booking allocation so that it may not be resold. From the vendors point of view there still exist four free local bookings and an unknown number of KIPS™ system bookings. However, the vendor may query the central database by communicating with the central database by means discussed above whereby information will be provided as to the number of remaining KIPS™ allocations. If the vendor wishes to reduce the KIPS™ system capacity, he or she communicates with the central database and reallocates capacity by either increasing or decreasing the system capacity. To effect this procedure, the vendor (in the simplest embodiment

envisaged) telephones the KIPS™ database system whereby the vendor is queried for a PIN or other identification number. Once the identification of the vendor is established, the vendor updates the appropriate database record by means of touch tone responses to audio queries. A single vendor may operate more than one service, therefore the vendor may be queried as to the particular record which is to be changed. Such a process is shown in Figure 3 by record 32 whereby the local capacity is increased by one booking unit and the KIPS™ systems is decreased by one. Alternatively, if the vendor wants to increase the KIPS™ systems capacity, he or she reduces the local capacity to A, B and C as shown in 33 and increases the system capacity to D, E, F and G.

When the user, following the steps shown in Figure 2 accepts the accommodation offered, the KIPS™ kiosk updates the central database thereby recording the sale of one accommodation unit G. Subsequent users will then be presented with a reduced accommodation capacity until the allocated system capacity is exhausted. Once the allocated capacity is exhausted the option of that particular accommodation product is not offered in the query process. The vendor may be notified of exhausted KIPS™ capacity automatically.

The particular system of allocation may be tailored to other products such as travel and the like. The advantage of this particular system is that the vendor can alter the allocated system capacity in response to seasonal or short term fluctuations in bookings. Further, the vendor can vary the allocated local and system capacity depending on the occurrence of public holidays, weekends and perhaps desirable ski conditions or the like. If an influx of local custom is expected the vendor may update the central database to limit significantly the system capacity. Alternatively, if local customer numbers are expected to be reduced, the system capacity may be significantly increased in order to intercept as many potential users as possible over a wide

geographical area. Kiosks in other geographical areas may interrogate a central database appropriate to one geographical area as this will be a step reflected in the query/response process shown in Figure 2.

It is envisaged that while the simplest method for the vendor to update the central database is by means of a touch tone telephone, the vendor may be provided with a personal computer running customised KIPS™ systems software, providing a more informative update interface. It is also envisaged that some vendors may suitably be permanently connected to a network service providers system whereby real time allocations and system capacity variations may be made in response to a particular sequence of user transactions. Such an online system may be particularly suitable for travel and product sales. In the situation where a vendor is permanently connected, the process of allocation, deduction and variation of the system capacity may be seamless and transparent.

Accordingly, it is advantageously shown that a user may autonomously view select and purchase a particular product, in this case accommodation, whereupon the user merely presents himself or herself at the vendor site. The process of travelling around and physically viewing accommodation sites, products and services is avoided, thereby saving considerable time and effort. Similar savings in time and effort occur in times of extreme or rapidly changing demand, whereby a user is able to rapidly changing demand, whereby a user is able to rapidly identify the source and purchase a desired product. Much of the information is centrally located and available to be queried in a searchable form. Information from accommodation sites further afield will be transmitted by the network to particular KIPS™ kiosk so that transactions involving accommodation sites in other geographical areas (potentially other countries) may be processed.

In addition to providing a booking facility for products and services, the present system may provide a means by which information may be distributed. With modern, relatively cheap, high quality printing technology, it is envisaged that on line information may be prepared in a pamphlet or other publication form, so that when the category selection corresponding to information is chosen, a user is presented with options such as providing detailed booklets or similar types of information, which, upon payment, are printed, or collated and perhaps bound at the kiosk site itself. For vendors with personal computer facilities, it is envisaged that the central database computers may provide a facility whereby a vendor can prepare, using conventional desktop publishing technology, publicity, information or similar material which are uploaded to the central database computer where they remain available for query, down load and printing at the remote KIPS™ kiosk. The payment required will vary with the nature of the publication and it may be seen that the present system provides an extremely flexible way for a vendor to provide printed information to a paying user. In the case of advertising pamphlets and information sheets, such a system will reduce waste in situations where a user would normally obtain a large number of information sheets which are reviewed and are only a small subset retained. The provision of searchable information in an online form will therefore reduce printing costs for vendors as well as wastage in terms of paper and printing materials. This particular embodiment of the service provided is also advantageous in that the online information may be quickly and readily updated, for example, if tariffs are changed or facilities expanded.

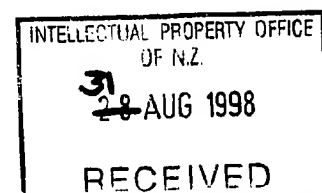
One skilled in the art will readily understand that there exists numerous modifications and improvements to the present system and that the invention may be adapted to many products, services and facilities. The system may be integrated with existing information networks, for example the financial transaction facility may be integrated at the router point with existing financial institution data networks.

Where in the foregoing description reference has been made to elements or integers having known equivalents, then such equivalence are included as if they were individually set forth.

Although the invention has been described by way of example and with reference to particular embodiments thereof, it is to be understood that modifications and/or improvements may be made without departing from the scope of the appended claims.

CLAIMS

1. A product and/or service purchasing system comprising:
one or more user interface means adapted to allow user interaction with a local and/or remote database;
one or more database;
one or more vendor interface means adapted to allow vendor interaction with said database, wherein the user interface means comprises a kiosk optionally including:
one or more display means;
information and/or query input means;
printing means;
audio transmission means;
financial transaction recordal means; and
on-site data storage means; wherein the database is adapted for access by both vendors and users wherein availability of products and/or services is governed by both sales to users recorded on the database and vendor updates which vary the availability of the services and/or products.
2. A product and/or service purchasing system as claimed in claim 1 wherein the vendor interface means corresponds to a touch tone telephone, personal computer or similar.
3. A product and/or service purchasing system as claimed in any preceding claim wherein the on-site data storage means contains one or more of the following:



graphical, textual, audio and multimedia based data.

4. A product and/or service purchasing system as claimed in any preceding claim wherein, the user interface means comprises an in-house television signal distribution system adapted to communicate with a local and/or remote database wherein commands

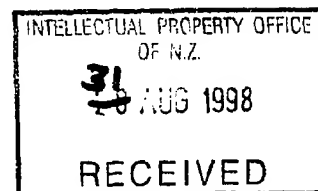
are transmitted to the database from the user via the signal distribution system which a user communicates with by means of an infrared remote control, key pad, touch tone telephone or similar.

5. A product and/or service purchasing system as claimed in any preceding claim wherein, the user interface means comprises a personal computer adapted to interact with a local and/or remote database.

6. A product and/or service purchasing system as claimed in any preceding claim wherein the one or more databases exchange data by means of one or more routers, said routers and databases being connected to a data transfer network.

7. A product and/or service purchasing system as claimed in any preceding claim wherein, the one or more databases communicate directly.

8. A product and/or service purchasing system as claimed in any preceding claim wherein the vendor interface means and user interface means communicate with either one or more routers and one or more central databases by means of telephone data links.



9. A product and/or service purchasing system as claimed in any preceding claim wherein the vendor interface means comprises a personal computer adapted to interact with a local and/or remote database.

10. A product and/or service purchasing system as claimed in any preceding claim wherein the vendor interface means are connected directly to either one or more routers or to one or more local and/or remote databases.

11. A method of recording product and/or service availability including the following steps:

a vendor establishes a booking record on a database via a vendor interface means, said booking record including information relating to the number of available booking units thereby establishing the availability of the products and/or services;

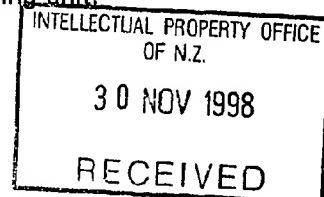
an end user establishes a connection with the database via a user interface means, wherein the user interrogates the database regarding the product and/or service availability according to the user's booking criteria;

if a free booking unit is available in a particular booking record corresponding to the end user's ultimate selection, the database transmits that information to the end user;

the end user optionally selects the booking unit or returns to the interrogation step;

the end user pays for the product or service corresponding to that booking unit thereby constituting a sale to the user;

the database is updated to reflect the sale of a booking unit.



12. A method of recording product and/or service availability as claimed in claim 11 further including the step of the vendor updating the database by:

establishing a communication link with a database;

flagging one or more booking units in a particular booking record as either sold or unsold.

13. A method of recording product and/or service availability as claimed in either claim 11 or claim 12 wherein the user updates the booking record by changing the system capacity in response to real time criteria.

14. A method of recording product and/or service availability as claimed in any one of claims 11 to 13 wherein the user interrogation step comprises:

selecting a particular product category;

entering parameters corresponding to the user's criteria requirements or taste;

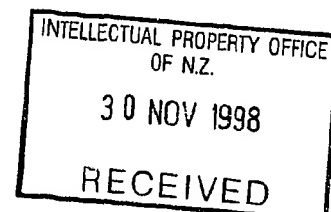
in response to each parameter input, the database providing one or more options from which the user may select one or more;

the user optionally requesting audio, video or textual information relating to the option, alternatively or in combination, the user requesting the purchase of a particular product;

the user accepting an option produced by specifying the appropriate criteria;

paying for the product where required; and

the system updating the database to reflect the sale of the product or distribution of the information.



15. A method of recording product and/or service availability as claimed in any one of claims 11 to 14 wherein the vendor prepares information in a form suitable for storage on the local or remote database, whereby the vendor uploads said information to the database.

16. A method of recording product and/or service availability as claimed in any one of claims 11 to 14 wherein the vendor updates the booking record by establishing a telecommunications link with the local or remote data wherein communication is effected by way of a touch tone telephone keypad.

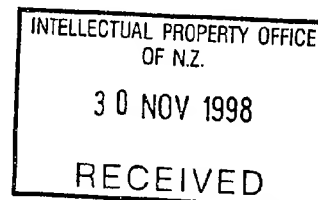
17. A product and/or service purchasing system substantially as herein described and with reference to figures 1 and 3 of the accompanying drawings.

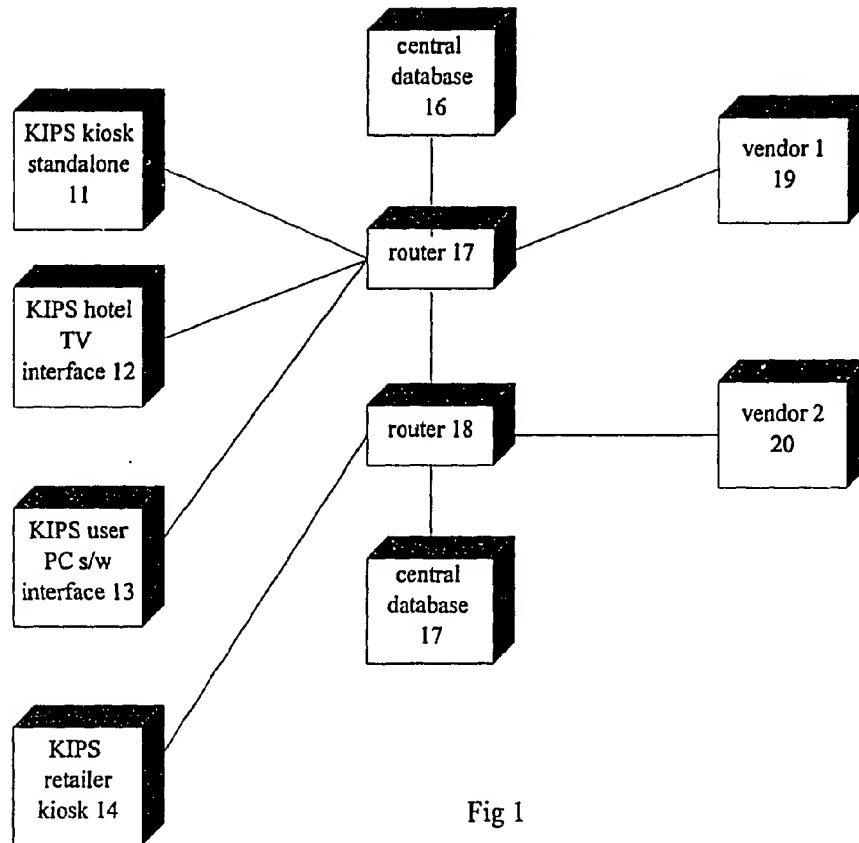
18. A method of recording product and/or service information substantially as herein described and with reference to figure 2 of the accompanying drawings.

V A RIVERS LIMITED


By their Attorneys
BALDWIN SHELSTON WATERS

END OF CLAIMS





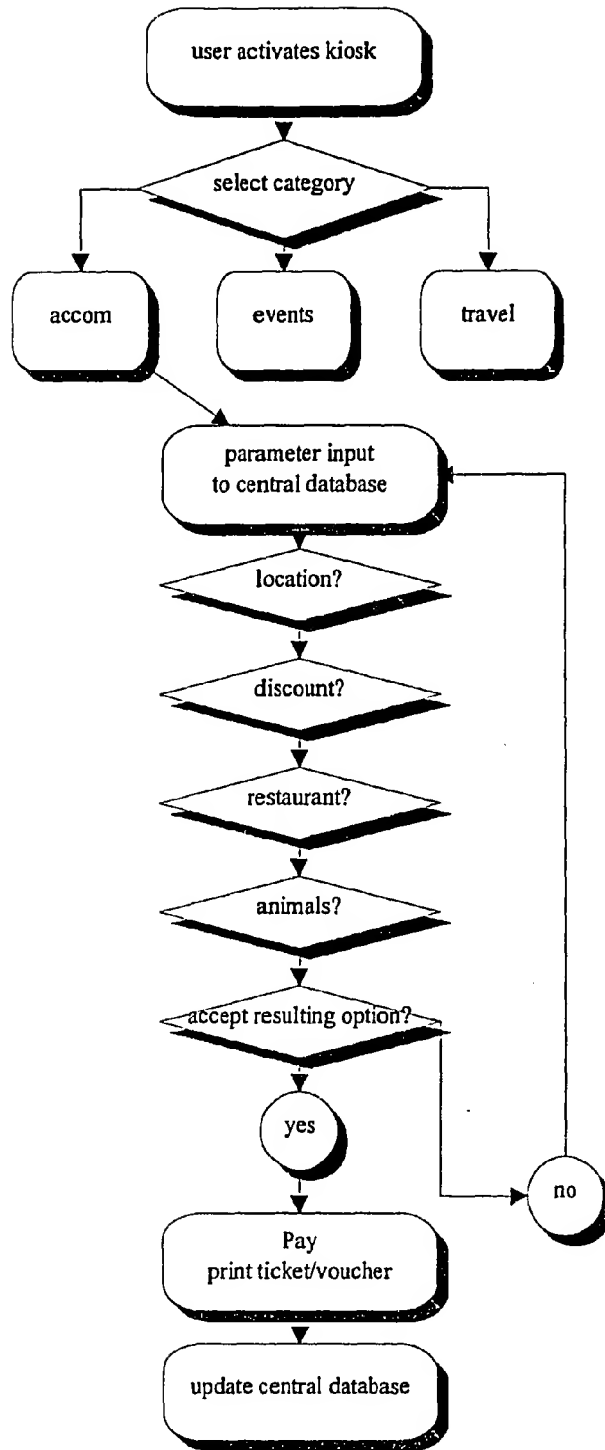


Fig 2

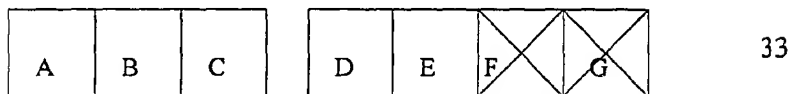
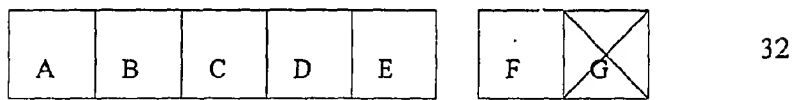
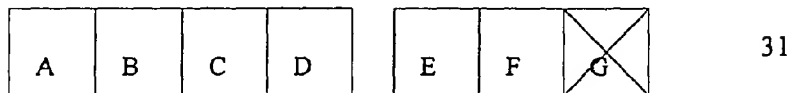


Fig 3

END